

Psychotherapy Guidebook



**MUTUAL
NEED
THERAPY**



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Mutual Need Therapy

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Mutual Need Therapy

Jesse K. Lair

DEFINITION

Mutual Need Therapy occurs when two or more people recognize their mutual need for each other and disclose their deeper and more private feelings about themselves to each other.

HISTORY

Mutual Need Therapy is my attempt to describe and make explicit a therapeutic process that so commonly occurs in life. Two natural “experiments” are primarily responsible for directing my attention to this area. The first involves the method commonly used to test outcomes of psychiatry or counseling. People presenting themselves for treatment are randomly assigned to one of two groups: the members of one group receive treatment; the other (control) group members do not. Often there is little evidence that treatment has had much effect. A major contaminant might be the Mutual Need Therapy that occurs. When patients present themselves for treatment, their defenses have usually begun to break down. Both the treated and untreated groups probably talk to some “significant others” (people who

are important in their lives). So there are possibly from one to ten people involved in the treatment of the subjects. The effect of the presence or absence of psychiatrist or counselor in the treatment, then, might easily be blurred.

The other natural experiment studied by the author and the major contributor to the development of the theory is the self-help movement of Alcoholics Anonymous. Though not an alcoholic, I was able to participate in AA over a ten-year period. The best description of what occurred in AA to free the alcoholic from his addiction was Mutual Need Therapy.

TECHNIQUE

In Mutual Need Therapy there is very little technique. For the two participants there are only a few basic guidelines that are helpful.

1. **Mutuality:** The first prerequisite is that there be a mutuality between the two people: they need to like each other just as they are; they cannot have any program to improve each other.

2. **Mutual need.** Each person in the relationship must see his need for the other person rather than feel the other person needs him. So it is a relationship of equals; each admitting his need for the other.

3. Openness to a higher power. The people involved need to be accepting of each other's views of a higher power, God, or a supreme being. As with any feeling, the feelings about some higher power are not to be argued with or disputed. 4. Each person is an expert only in his own feelings. No judging, criticizing, or analyzing is to be done.

5. The participants, except for the above few guidelines, are free to say and do what seems appropriate. The other participant or participants are free to listen to the feelings and support the person. In this format, there is only one way for someone to give counsel to another when asked: to tell how he faced a similar problem, what he did and how it worked for him. But the overwhelming emphasis is on listening to and accepting the other person, as well as enjoying his presence.

APPLICATIONS

I use Mutual Need Therapy in working with people presenting themselves for counseling when there is an adequate amount of mutuality in the relationship. I also advocate that all people seeking better relationships establish some mutual need relationships in order to benefit from the therapeutic effects that come from a deep acceptance of a person just as he is.

